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Management Training

for Supervisors and Staff Officers

UNIT 9

Principles of Organization

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Soil Conservation Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

You cannot teach a man anything;

You can only help him to find it within himself.

Galileo

UNIT 9

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION

OBJECTIVES

To help us understand:

- (a) the purpose,
- (b) the structure,
- (c) the principles, and
- (d) the operations

of a good organization.

Three conditions are essential to good organization: Communication, Willingness to serve, and a common purpose.

The beginnings of organization probably all started when one of our early cave men ancestors prevailed upon his neighbor to carry the heavy end of a log. This job would require some simple organizing, but 3 main conditions had to exist before much could be done about it. In the first place, he had to make his proposition known so it could be understood; he had to communicate with his neighbor. In the second place, his neighbor had to be willing to help on the job of lifting -- there had to be willingness to serve. Finally, you can be sure the other fellow was not going to carry this log around for fun -- there had to be a reason that he agreed with -- a common purpose. Generally speaking, the conditions for organization are present when we have: (1) a means of communication, (2) willingness to serve, and (3) a common purpose.

Organization implies order and leadership

Assuming that these 3 elements are present, let us get clearly in our own minds what we mean by organization. Organization in the formal sense means "order." It is impossible to imagine even an informal group of 3 or 4 people, united for a transient purpose, which does not consider some order or system in doing what they propose to do. This implies organization. Also, there must be in such a

group, somehow or somewhere, leadership which coordinates; plans what to do, how to do it.

There are many definitions of organization.

The fact there are many definitions of organization is evidence that people have different ideas about what to emphasize in getting order and system. Sometimes the subject is approached from the point of view of structure. For example, Webster says, among other definitions, that organization is "the executive structure of a business." Again, it has been defined as "the various persons who conduct a business, considered as a unit." Neither is quite satisfactory for our purpose, for we are interested primarily in a practical definition which will reflect the things that are in our mind when we talk in everyday language about SCS.

In SCS organization begins with our people.

As far as we are concerned, when we speak of the Soil Conservation Service organization, we mean the structure, the people, Service philosophies, the method of operation, the whole works, as it appears in action. If we were going to make a formal definition, I think we might say it in this way: "A group of people arranged in interdependent units, each with a special function or relation with respect to the whole, acting in coordination for the accomplishment of a common purpose."

External objective is to get the job done.

Let us consider briefly this matter of "purpose" in organization. Different labels are used by different people; some call it "objective," others, "the goal," or "the aim" of the organization. It is not too important to us what the label is. What is important is to recognize that there are generally two kinds of purposes or objectives, one external and one internal. The external purpose is the thing we get together to do, to build a different kind of automobile, to explore the rubber producing areas of the Upper Amazon, or "to aid in bringing about physical adjustments in land use that will better human welfare, conserve natural resources, establish a permanent and balanced agriculture, and reduce the hazards of floods and sedimentation."

Internal objective is coordination to do the job in the best way.

Now, experience has taught us that instead of going at a job haphazardly, we can make better progress if we band ourselves together in a very special way so that we can identify and use effectively those special talents in the group which are useful in accomplishing the common purpose. We can get order and system and do the job with less confusion if we co-ordinate our efforts. Therefore, internally, the objective is coordination. The organization may eventually be symbolized in graphic form by charts which show how the people in the organization are divided into interdependent units, each with a special job to do. These charts are merely a convenience which helps us see at a glance what the parts of the organization are and what each part is supposed to do.

This unit will discuss internal objectives.

Our discussion will be directed primarily toward the internal objective of coordination and some of the things required to obtain co-ordination; how to secure unity of action, prevent overlapping activities, promote common understanding or, in other words, coordinate our efforts so that we may insure quality, economy, speed and public appreciation and satisfaction in the accomplishment of our common purpose.

The structure

Organizational charts show assignment of functions. It is the house in which the organization lives.

The assignment of functions in an organization may be shown on what we call organizational charts or functional charts. These take various forms. They may show division by functions, by professions, by clientele, by geographic areas or some other basis. No matter what the arrangement is, it will show first the source of authority for the organization, whether it be an individual, a board, committee or some other source of authority, and, it will show at least the functions of the principal divisions of the organization and the relation of these divisions to the source of authority and to each other.

This picture of the organization can be developed in varying degrees of detail; but it makes no difference how fancy it is, it is merely the house, the structure, in which the organization lives. Nevertheless, we must not

dismiss it as unimportant because it is just as important to the organization as a dwelling is to the family. It must be soundly designed and built, it must be comfortable for the organization to live in; the arrangement and size of the rooms must be such as to enable the people who use them to work efficiently; it must be adequate, yet not so large or complicated that people get confused in going from room to room.

SCS organization is based on principle of "Line and Staff."

Organizations assume many different patterns, but most present day organizations are based on what is known as the line and staff system. The general impression is that this system originated in military organizations, but this is not quite correct. The system has been in use for centuries, but credit must be given to military organizations for developing the system into an effective working basis for organization purposes. In the Soil Conservation Service the objective of coordination is approached through a functional organization based on the line and staff principles.

Reduced to simple terms, the line and staff system is merely a chain of organization units operating under authority delegated from a central source; and at various designated points in the organization there are groups of people called staff, whose function is advisory as distinguished from the function of command.

In its simplest form the line and staff organization has a leader who is the source of authority and subordinates, each having specific duties, who assist the leader in doing his job and to whom he has delegated a certain part of his authority so that they may act with varying degrees of independence in carrying out the leader's instructions.

The size of the organization affects length of the line.

As the organization gets larger, this chain becomes longer and sub-delegation appears, or another link in the chain. All functions are present at the top vested in the leader. As the chain begins to lengthen, we usually find that the organization begins to throw off functions so that it is customary to find fewer functions represented as the chain grows out from the head of the organization.

Line has command function

This simple chain or organization we call "the line" and we customarily say that it is the line of authority and carries the function of command. As the organization becomes larger the leader will usually recognize that the business of running this organization has become so complicated that he needs another type of assistance in addition to the assistance he gets from his line officers to whom he has delegated part of his authority. At this point we find him introducing the staff.

Function of the staff is to advise.

The function of the staff is to advise, to counsel, to inform; and under certain special conditions, it has supervisory responsibilities. It does not have authority in the sense that officers of the line have authority. It does not command. In common administrative language, it operates under the authority of ideas. Generally the staff supplies to the leader information he needs to make decisions. It advises him with respect to the carrying out of these decisions. It carries out for him certain control functions which he requires to keep his organization and its operations within certain defined boundaries. It may perform review functions to assure the leader that operations are being carried out according to his instructions. It develops processes to improve coordination and assist him to carry out such processes. Also in special cases the leader may actually delegate certain command authority to the staff, but these cases are the exception rather than the rule. It is not right to assume that the line part of an organization is the part that represents the doing function and that staff represents the thinking or planning function. Line officers perform both functions; but staff, unless specially authorized, performs only the kind of functions we have just discussed.

Leader may delegate command authority to staff.

PRINCIPLES

There are certain principles of organization which any good leader observes in developing his organization. Let us assume, for example, that a job has been authorized and a leader designated with the authority necessary to develop an organization and do what is required to get the task completed. It has been decided that the job can't be done in one spot. The organization will have to be decentralized.

What are the working principles?

It has been decided that because of the complexity of the job it would be best to divide it into groups, each having a special task or function, also that staff assistance will be needed to run the organization. What then are the working principles which the leader must take into consideration so as to arrange his organization in a manner that will promote maximum efficiency and economy, involve the least confusion, be easiest to control, and in general be most effectively coordinated?

1. Lines of authority in the organization must be clear.

We must know where authority comes from and where it goes.

The lines of authority are sometimes called chains of command. The principal line in the Service extends, as we have already noted, from the Administrator to the State Conservationist, to the Area Conservationist, to the Work Unit Conservationist. But there are other lines that are clearly set forth; for example, there is a line of authority from the Washington Division Director to his Branch Chiefs, and thence to the Unit Heads. These side lines denote the way in which authority flows, in this case within a staff division.

2. Channels of authority should not be violated by staff units.

Don't mix line and staff functions.

We have already referred to the general responsibilities of staff units in a line and staff organization and have attempted to distinguish between the staff function and functions of line units. Few organization problems cause more difficulty than failure to distinguish between line and staff activities, and no administrative practice can create greater confusion than failure to keep command channels clear. In large and complex organizations it becomes impossible for an individual to direct and coordinate the organization, and staff assistants become necessary. The word "staff" itself implies something to lean upon. In a sense, staff personnel are divisions of the organization heading specialized segments. The larger the

organization the greater the necessity for the advisors to assist the leader in the performance of his responsibilities. It is important to remember that staff personnel are assistants to the head and that all authority they exercise must be exercised in his name. Staff personnel should not be prevented from having contact with other staff officers. These contacts, however, should be informal and should not take on the color of directives.

Staff units themselves require coordination. In some organizations certain staff units are large and are themselves broken down into subordinate parts. While the main staff unit acts in an advisory capacity to the organization as a whole, we find the head of the staff unit acting in the dual capacity of staff officer in relation to the entire organization and administrative officer in the sense that he directs and coordinates the work of the various sub-units in his staff organization. The main organization looks to the staff officer for coordinated advice and counsel. Therefore, the points of view of all staff sub-units must be brought into proper relation with each other.

3. Everyone in the organization should know (a) to whom he reports and (b) who reports to him.

No man can serve two masters.

No person should report to more than one supervisor. This is merely another way of saying that no man can serve two masters and serve them efficiently.

4. The number of subordinates reporting to a supervisor should not exceed the number which can be effectively coordinated and directed.

How many people can one man supervise?

This is often called the principle of span of control. Many textbooks still claim that one supervisor cannot direct and coordinate the efforts of more than 5 or 6 people. This idea is derived from military operations in wartime when the element of uncertainty is very great, and coordination and direction require the closest possible attention. Even military organizations, however, have wider spans of control than this in peacetime.

An organization operating in periods of emergency usually needs a shorter span of control. Where standards do not change on an emergency basis, however, and the pattern of operation is well known, spans of control can be much wider. In many industries of large size, the span of control reaches 20 to 25 people.

Span of control in SCS
affects your job as
a supervisor.

In the Service, the average Area Conservationist supervises 10-12 work unit conservationists, 3-5 specialists, and a clerk; his span of control, therefore, is about 14 to 20. An average State Conservationist may supervise a secretary, 2 assistants, 3 program staff members, an administrative officer, and 6 area conservationists; his span of control is, therefore, about 13 people (more in some States, less in others).

5. Authority should be delegated, insofar as possible, to the units or individuals nearest the point where action takes place.

The man on the firing line has a much better grasp of conditions confronting him than anyone else, and insofar as possible decisions should be made at the point of action in the interest of expediting performance. Personnel should be selected for their ability to use wisely authority which is given them.

The task of coordinating the large and complex organization of government is one of the foremost problems of the modern administrator. Some organizations have found it necessary to provide for a unit whose sole responsibility is devising methods for coordination. This may be necessary in some instances but frequently the trouble is ineffective delegation. Appropriate delegation would frequently reduce the problem of coordination by making it possible to take action on problems on the spot.

6. Every function necessary to accomplish the purpose for which the organization is created must be assigned to a unit of the organization.

This principle is obvious but it requires thorough and thoughtful analysis of the

job. It is not unusual to find that some particular function has been left hanging in the air between units of the organization, resulting in varying degrees of confusion when several units attempt to do the same job.

Clear written responsibilities are needed.

Furthermore, the responsibilities assigned to an organization unit must be specific, clear, and easily understood. It goes without saying that the responsibilities should be in writing. If the writing isn't clear, there is bound to be confusion. Obviously also, no function should be assigned to more than one independent unit of organization.

7. Responsibility for a function should be accompanied by authority necessary to perform the function.

Authority goes with responsibility.

No individual or unit of organization can be held responsible for the successful performance of any job unless the responsibility carries with it the authority to complete the job. This principle is closely related to delegation of authority.

8. The same general pattern of organizational structure should be used at each level of organization.

The organization pattern should be uniform.

This principle is extremely important. If not followed, it results in widespread confusion created by units of organization having to deal with miscellaneous groups throughout the organization, each performing the same function or parts of the same function. This practice also defeats any attempt to make comparative surveys throughout the organization for management purposes.

9. Organization should not be permitted to grow so elaborate as to hinder work accomplishment.

Too many levels may result in action around channels or delay.

This principle applies both vertically and horizontally in an organization. If there are too many levels, the chain of command may get quite long. In turn, instructions and information take too long to travel up

or down; and there are more places where it is likely to be delayed. Too many levels also tend to encourage "end-runs" by men who want to get something done and quickly. They may try to skip past several levels to get at a higher executive for quicker decisions.

Horizontally also, an organization can get too elaborate. Too many staff assistants or a clutter of special staff units that are not well organized by functions, can cause confusion in an organization. This reminds us of Principle No. 2, which suggests the solution to too many unco-ordinated little units or individual staff people.

10. The organization should be flexible enough to adjust readily to changing conditions.

The organization must be able to change with conditions.

An organization will encounter hard times and good times. It may undertake new functions or lose old ones. Whatever happens, an organization plan should be one that can expand or contract without damage to the fundamental design. What has been called organizational paralysis can block the effective functioning of any organization if times change and the organization remains static.

OPERATING AN ORGANIZATION

It would be wrong to leave the impression that observance of these principles will automatically provide a good organization. Before we can say it is good, an appraisal has to be made of the techniques used in running the organization. It is true that good administration can make a poor organization function after a fashion. It is equally true that poor administration can quickly neutralize the advantages of a good organization. One often wonders what the attitude of a good design engineer might be toward one of his own machines which he happens to be using himself, whether he provides for proper lubrication, preventive maintenance, and fuel; whether he is as skilled an operator as he is a designer. Instances are probably numerous of people who

Organizations, like cars, must be kept in good running condition.

are finicky about the care of their own private car and yet allow the main bearings of a million-dollar organization to burn out without even being conscious of the fact. Just like a machine, an organization needs and must have intelligent and skilled care and attention to turn out the best work.

We must have a skilled operator, too.

A good administrator is a skilled operator. He knows that high morale is the best lubrication an organization can get, and he provides those things which make for such morale. He knows that an organization feeds and grows on successful accomplishment. He is aware also of another important fact, that an organization depreciates from lack of use as well as from misuse, and therefore he uses the organization constantly but intelligently. If he did not do so, the organization would eventually acquire the dust and rust and creaky joints of old age. We should weigh carefully the criticisms of people who are not skilled in administrative techniques, for the worth of an organization can only be measured in terms of intelligent use. The perfect organization has not been created, but many good ones have been discarded when a little more attention to proper use would have boosted their stock a hundred percent.

Many factors make an organization go.

Some of the administrative factors affecting organization are worth enumerating briefly, and one which would most often be nominated for first place would be the establishment and promulgation of policy. Failure to maintain an open mind with respect to desirable changes in policy will eventually be fatal to any organization. Policy rarely remains permanently fixed, and most organizations find it necessary to make changes in policy to fit the growing needs and ever changing conditions of modern life. This does not mean that the organization has to be shaken constantly by such changes, because they do not occur that frequently. It is not the changes that hurt an organization so much as failure on the part of an organization to supply to its people information about the change. Information concerning organization policy and the basic reasons for its establishment or changes or modification is the very foundation on which successful organization administration rests.

We have already referred to the importance of appropriate delegation of authority, but delegation alone is not the whole story. It is tied very closely to other things. The factor of individual efficiency is closely related. All the delegation in the world will not get things done if the individuals to whom authority is delegated are not adequately prepared through training and experience to act with confidence up to the full measure of their authority. When we refer to training, we must assume that it includes providing information regarding policy, for training is not a thing which begins this week and ends next week. It continues day after day as long as the individual concerned is in the organization, and it should include a regular and reliable means of communicating to him the things he needs to know about the organization in order to do his job well. Stories of World War II are full of references to the necessity for keeping even the smallest units of organization completely informed about what is going on. If delegated authority is to bear the fruits of prompt and effective action, it must be supplemented by reliable information systematically provided as a basis for administrative decision.

The purpose must always be kept clear.

Organization has little meaning unless it is kept closely tied to objectives. In a large and far-flung organization this is not always an easy thing to do. We need to back off quite a way sometimes and take a candid look at the whole scene of action to make sure that objectives are not sacrificed because of our concern over the organization and vice versa. Some means of control is necessary. Organizations have a tendency to bulge in the most unexpected spots. Rarely do they shrink, but they sometimes have a tendency to get flabby in spots. The administrator must have some means of helping him see these things if he is to keep the delicate balance between the over-all purpose and the organization which was created to accomplish it. It is important, however, that there should be a skilled hand at the control levers. Sudden starts and stops damage an organization as much as they do an automobile, and the passengers grumble about the driver.

We need "directing touch."

One technique seldom referred to in the running of an organization is what someone has called "the directing touch." It is a rather intangible thing and yet one which contributes

immeasurably to the successful functioning of any organization. This is a sympathetic awareness on the part of top management that reaches down through the channels of administration to bring a particular activity up for tolerant and helpful scrutiny and counsel. Too often there is a tendency on the part of management to "let well enough alone" with the result that an individual or unit, although doing a good job, may actually be just as isolated as a family in a New York apartment. This sort of a process is a hard thing to carry through, but it pays dividends; and like putting money in a savings bank each month, it takes will-power.

The People

When we were trying to define what we meant by organization, we said that organization is "a group of people arranged in interdependent units." It is difficult to think of organization except in terms of people, and since people are the most important factors in organization, it seems appropriate to close this discussion with a few observations about their relationship with the organization.

It is the people who make an organization.

People are what give life to an organization. It is well for us to keep this constantly in mind for an organization in action staffed with people working is an entirely different thing from a set of charts and functions and job descriptions. Management has certain obligations to its people, and the people have certain obligations to management and the organization. The leader or the leaders of an organization eventually generate what might be called an administrative climate. The workers in the organization live and work a good part of their lives in this climate. Therefore, it should be right and healthful; because, if it is not, the conditions are right for the people to contract many administrative ailments. It is an important obligation of the leaders to create this climate in which the people work, and this applies equally to a small unit of organization and the organization as a whole.

Management has certain definite obligations to its people which will help create the proper

We must have a good objective.

climate. The first thing, we believe, is to set a worthy objective. People still believe in working for a good cause, and they will rally around an idea if by their own individual processes of reasoning they come to the conclusion that the cause is good, is sound, is lasting, and that they are contributing something to the public good when they are working for it.

People want to be appreciated.

Management must take an interest in the people, both official and personal, although the personal angle can be overdone. People do not like to be numbers or chessmen to be moved around like inanimate objects. They want somebody to be aware of them as individuals and as a contributing factor in the organization for which they work. Very few want flattery. Most want management to know and approve of what they are doing; and they will gladly take guidance, counsel and constructive criticism on how they do it.

Communications again are important.

Management must supply the fuel for official accomplishment. By this we mean pertinent information about the organization, its objectives, its policies, its procedures, that the individual can absorb and use as an ingredient in his daily job.

Consistency is essential.

Management must be reasonably consistent in the way it uses the various parts of the organization. You just don't design a structure for particular uses and then change the signals so that the parts are used for entirely different purposes. It leads to a lot of confusion any place and particularly in an organization.

People, too, have obligations.

The people have certain definite obligations to the organization and to its management. The organization exists for the accomplishment of a purpose. Therefore, the people have an obligation to keep this purpose constantly in their minds and to think seriously about it in terms of their own jobs. Accomplishments should be measures in the light of this purpose, for each individual's efforts should push the organization just a little further along the road toward its goal.

If management supplies information about the organization and its policies and objectives

as it should, then the people must do something about using the information. It must be studied, analyzed, understood, and used. It is the individual who translates organization policy into action and results, but the process of absorption and assimilation must precede action if results are going to show an advance toward the organization objective.

Pride in the organizational promotes loyalty and esprit de corps.

People owe the organization loyalty, but is should be a very special kind of loyalty. What we are talking about is a spontaneous loyalty that grows out of pride and respect for the organization and belief in its objectives and the way it goes about obtaining those objectives. Management has the responsibility for conducting the affairs of the organization so as to inspire this kind of loyalty among the people that work in it.

We have been talking about some of the factors that make up that intangible thing called morale. Few can adequately define it, yet organizations cannot exist without it. It is not acquired by accident, nor can it be gotten by assembling a picked body of shock troops. It has to be built--and maintained. It has its source in leadership. In the final analysis the people in the organization make it what it is. If they have belief in the organization purpose, pride in its management, reasonable incentive and fair play, they will have high morale. But the leaders must make these things possible. That is why those of us who deal with organization must be versed in its principles, skillful in its use and maintenance, and thoughtful of the people who work in it.

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